



**RURAL
SERVICES
NETWORK**

Rural Access to Health & Care Services

**The National Rural Conference
September 2025**

The National Champion For Rural Services

Government plans for health



HM Government

PLAN FOR CHANGE

Milestones for mission-led government

5 December 2024

Build an NHS fit for the future

Ending hospital backlogs

The starting point

For decades, the NHS has served us well, with the enduring principle that everyone should get healthcare that is free at the point of use. Yet, Lord Darzi's independent investigation into the NHS found the health service is in "critical condition". The investigation laid bare the challenges that the NHS and the nation's health are facing. But it has also made it absolutely clear that total, fundamental and long-term reform of our NHS is critical to its survival: a total reimagining of the NHS.

Lord Darzi found the NHS is failing to deliver on one of its most important promises: timely access to care. In England, the waiting list for elective treatment stood at 7.6 million in September 2024, with more than 3 million waiting over 18 weeks. People are waiting too long to get the GP or NHS dentist appointments they need, and 10% of patients are now waiting for 12 hours or more in A&E. Long waits have become routine and public satisfaction is, understandably, at a record low as a result. But the pressures facing the NHS are symptomatic of a wider set of issues. As Lord Darzi's investigation found, there has been a deterioration in the nation's health. People are spending more of their lives in ill-health and the gap in healthy life expectancy between the poorest and richest is growing.

This is not just bad for those people, but is a drag anchor on the wider economy. There are 2.8 million people out of work due to health conditions, creating a cycle of poor health and poverty for many, holding back opportunities and economic growth.

The NHS is broken but not beaten. As Lord Darzi found, its "vital signs remain strong". The long-term survival of the health service depends on both investment and, more importantly, reform. The Budget started to address these problems, with a nearly £26 billion boost for the healthcare system, across day-to-day spending and capital investment, over two years. But investment alone is not the solution – investment must come with reform. That is what the health mission will deliver: fundamental reforms to improve the way care is provided – improving people's health and putting the NHS on a more sustainable footing. We will capitalise on the scientific and technological revolution happening all around us to deliver better outcomes for patients and better value for taxpayers' money.

Kickstart economic growth	Build an NHS fit for the future	Safer streets	Break down the barriers to opportunity	Make Britain a clean energy superpower
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Our missions

FIT FOR THE FUTURE

10 Year Health Plan for England

Government plans for health



It is making 3 big shifts to how the NHS works:

- **From hospital to community:** more care will be available on people's doorsteps and in their homes
- **From analogue to digital:** new technology will liberate staff from admin and allow people to manage their care as easily as they bank or shop online
- **From sickness to prevention:** we'll reach patients earlier and make the healthy choice the easy choice

Rural is mentioned!



*“While the focus on personalised, coordinated care will be consistent, that will mean the **service offer will look different in rural communities**, coastal towns or deprived inner cities.”*

*“Evidence shows that people in working class jobs, who are from ethnic minority backgrounds, **who live in rural or coastal areas** or deindustrialised inner cities, who have experienced domestic violence, or who are homeless, are more likely to experience worse NHS access, worse outcomes and to die younger.”*

*“We know, including from our engagement, that ‘**one size fits all**’ misses the distinct needs of women, people from ethnic minority backgrounds or **people who live in more rural communities**, among many others.”*

A government document has recognised that one size fits all doesn't work!!!

From hospital to community



Difficulties in accessing services due to poor transport links



Only 80.9% of rural residents can access a GP in 30 minutes



This is compared to 99.8% in urban areas.



67% longer ambulance times in rural areas

From analogue to digital



Residential Superfast Coverage

	Total	Urban	Rural
England	98%	99%	90%

Residential Gigabit Capable Coverage

“The government is committed to achieving nationwide gigabit coverage and expects 99% of premises to have access to a gigabit-capable connection by 2032.”

	Total	Urban	Rural
England	84%	88%	54%

From sickness to prevention



67% of rural areas lacking specialist mental health provision

“NHS mental health services are often not fairly accessible for rural communities, with services largely centred in towns and cities creating barriers to access, compounded by the limitations and weaknesses of rural public transport and digital connectivity.”

“Far too much avoidable demand ends up at the door of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in rural areas because of a fundamental lack of social infrastructure and youth services.”

EFRA Select Committee report into Rural Mental Health 2023



Only 30% adults been seen by NHS dentist in rural areas compared to 43% in urban within previous 24 months (23/24)



Urban authorities will this year (25/26) receive 57% more per head in Public Health Allocation funding compared to rural



Opportunity to get it right?



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BUT...

- Where will neighbourhood health services be based?
- Will we have improved broadband and mobile coverage to be able to use the technology?
- If we continue to underfund rural areas and focus on high clusters deprivation, what happens to our ageing rural community where deprivation is often hidden?
- How do we fix the problem of recruiting and retaining our healthcare professionals?

Delivering for All

A ROADMAP FOR RURAL PROSPERITY
Every person, in every place, deserves the chance to thrive, including everyone in our rural communities.




Access to Rural Health and Care Services

Access to high-quality health and care services is a cornerstone of thriving communities, yet rural areas often face challenges such as workforce shortages, longer travel times, and higher service delivery costs.

Residents in rural communities deserve equitable access to healthcare, tailored to their unique needs and circumstances. Investing in rural health and care is essential for reducing disparities, supporting wellbeing, and ensuring sustainable, inclusive communities.

1 in 4 Rural areas will see fastest growth in 65+ population over next 20 years. Currently on average, **1 in 4** people are aged over 65 in rural areas.

29% 29% of rural residents couldn't get NHS dental appointments in 2023/24.

Key Asks ✓

1. Fair Funding
Ensure strategy is Rural Proofed, especially proposals designed to tackle the core drivers of disparities in health outcomes including quality of housing, and access to good quality jobs and training.
This must also take into account the whole range of extra costs of delivering services in rural areas and ensure that they are accurately reflected in funding formulae.

2. Metrics and Measures
Address the lack of understanding of the distinctive health and care needs of rural areas by ensuring measures are collected at the right level to deliver services that are suited to the specific needs of rural places. Develop integrated services that provide holistic person-centred care.

3. Rural Policy
Deliver a rural work force strategy to aid training and recruitment across all health and care services including dentistry.
Protect rural communities by ensuring that they have access to mental health services that meet their needs.
Create a culture which ensures the Third Sector is included as a partner in the integrated planning system and resourced accordingly, where it is cost effective to do so and in the community's interests.
The contribution of community and voluntary organisations must not be underestimated, not least with respect to prevention and wellbeing.

? Everyone deserves the right to access quality health and care services. Rural residents can face unique challenges—from workforce shortages to geographic isolation—that demand tailored policies to ensure their wellbeing.

<https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/delivering-for-all>